

Sir King,

Certainly by now there's been a realization that books are literature and literature is art. Fruition is the tongue which has tasted the forbidden fruit. Although exciting to pursue a singular region of expertise, not being able to do anything else is scary if you can't do that one thing. A person with the insight to write well requires a method of what in step four of the AA preamble is known as a fearless and moral inventory. Monetary until exactly the right amount of measures a man's worth not in his stature but direction of moral compass. A navigational beacon beckoning to what in French is called L'appel du vide.

What draws who he refers to as constant reader in, is the twisted plot enabling text long enough to satisfy not just the dedication but to the original creator as well. If he cannot imagine it neither can they. Trepidation utilization manifests itself in perturbing ways, the source of fear dwells within a chasm as dark as a black hole in which light may enter but not exit. Doing something once is not enough to wield the power associated with mastering a craft. Most times more often than not we are left wondering what to do with it when we finally get there. Persuasion is a means of getting what one wants, impossible for the owner to create if not for an inner sanctum residing in the body's temple. The choice of actively discovering oneself is not an easy decision to make and while others have made the bold assumption that they understand the meaning of their reality in this plane of existence the fact is many don't and are obsessed in being right strengthening a delusion of the innate purpose we all seem to be driven to pursue. There is no hot and cold tap when it comes to creativity, it is simply turned on and off. The endeavor of achievement has been repeated many times throughout history and in order to be successful others have to fail.

This story is in remembrance of Sundog. I am unsure if Ma'am played a more important role in this or Needful things. Whichever is true the most prevailing tool a writer can use is that they put down whatever is the most factual word currently at disposal. What enters the mind is uncontrollable and a filter is needed so we don't all decide to live in our own filth. Translating loses much of its ability to convey meaning if credit isn't given to an interpreter there would be no knowledge that in Russian humor is lost but that is not to say nullifies the distinction between that and horror. Everything fades in time, entire empires have dedicated their existence to art, books as no surprise were thrown in there. Paper being made had to be concurrent with the idea to organize a keyboard which the fingers find naturally. That is not to say we can't fall back into our old habits. Cursive is an out of date form of long hand but appears more elegant before typed on a pad. Boredom is when you're so alone with your thoughts that blank spaces are filled in. Contemporary literature teaches us about the moment in history it took place, whether it's here and now or somewhere else out there is up to the author. Without Art the Earth is just Eh. There is no formula to conform to, it's a dangerous way of losing proper context in a world where there's no such thing as an original thought. The immense span of the imagination contributes to simulation theory in that everything possibly conceived is able to happen relative to where we are in the moment. A wealth of abundance has created the illusion of security and a shared illusion is reality. To wander into the unknown is to realize when you're halfway through the woods so you can either decide to turn around or keep going.

Fortunes have turned the tide of destiny. For many very little is actually necessary to rebuild what may very soon become a lost ancient civilization. When he says to be careful

putting the lyrics to a song in writing what I believe he means is to be carefully cautious of a cross between genres. Aliens make a disturbing amount of appearances presumably because we are the aliens and don't want to lose touch with the idea of humanity, a self-identified concept. Enduring the process of writing a book is being competent enough to finish it, to know in your head where your heart is leading you. The hero's journey has been amazingly well thought out and has made its way into myths, legends, nursery rhymes and yes, even Fairy Tales where an important distinction had to be made when it came to spelling and word play. If Radar was lost for good nobody would want to read through to the end of what has been consistent in its merit to be reread. When picking a book to read there is no time to waste on anything that isn't of a high caliber. If you want to do something to make you happy, read this novella and take note that one is longer than the other to eliminate requirements for a beginning, middle and end, as an introduction is usually supplied by an outsider(!) This could be viewed that way but, it doesn't matter as long as the ego doesn't overinflate. Writing has an effect of eliminating distractions, reading is the opposite meant to pull you into another world.

Putting on a front to expose the world to a false version of the person you best visualize as yourself is mute. The preconceived notion that you are the way you are and always will be puts terrible restriction on a soul that needs to change. Before starting something new consider if you've thought it through and while some of the G.O.A.T's may believe in letting a story guide you, the individual is the final naysayer. If you don't have to research something before you write it, it probably doesn't teach you any lessons other than drama, and this I believe is why 11/22/63 was so awe inspiring. You have to teach yourself new things in order to optimize potential, only until you see what lies within does it conclusively experience consciousness. Knowing this is crucial to understanding what we are capable of in full capacity. Fear without doubt starts unwinding what can only be called what it is and that's nonsense. There's no such thing as luck, the use of trickery slows to a stop as soon as a magician reveals his secret. The love is so strong for Sir King, it would go unjustly to say Sundog is complete when he doesn't even know why put it in Four Past Midnight's random title. Photomask is meant to expand upon what has been deeply driven into with references to the Gunslinger in nearly everything. It wouldn't be the same to subsequently write them all back to back but, when something's finished it's over. Taking in the alternate universe is feasibly possible if you were to absorb everything and if you've been keeping up with your reading quota that would take over a year and hopefully many more yet still to come. From the appearance in Carrie in a nurse's hand in the movie The Power which in the Shudder movie archive describes it as taking place in 1974 when the book wasn't reported on file in the New American Library until the following year. None of this has been found by accident as the runaway lawnmower in Maximum Overdrive claims to be when the man who lost his eye was involved in film production. For this to happen many people had to have been involved and there are many interesting theories as to why the start of the movie is funny when the director took his main occupation so very seriously, as he did with alcohol. There is no anonymity in fame and if you show me who your friends are I'll tell you who you are.

Living under universal laws depicting how every man should be is a good standard to govern oneself. Without the ability to gather a substantial quantity of information it would be impossible to pass judgment. Taking into consideration that we are all trapped inside beings with the power to exponentially increase it, there is no reason to reexamine situations that will only become increasingly more difficult. Great minds think alike and while the fleeting memory of

ourselves is temporary, what makes us individual as humans doesn't take away from the collective soul. It is not my intention to take away from a piece of art that isn't mine, only that there may be a more broad perspective to take into consideration. When a step back is taken to admire a pretty picture then it can have the beauty it depicts appreciated. Nostalgia is a key component to this and nothing must be lost on what started it to begin with. Not everything is what it seems, if something seems too good to be true then it probably is. By remaining in question it's assumable to make the assumption IT is not merely about somebody's worst nightmares but the alarming rate at which technology has evolved, and how the Loser's Club all had their own demons to confront. Particular attention to detail must be held when saying Bev's father wanted to molest her. Fun Fact: A pack of feral hogs can eat a pedophile in less than ten minutes, or perhaps you've never read Hannibal Rising by Thomas Harris. Horror is a way of life for some people. The original moving picture had to live up to a masterpiece and the future remake had to be done back to back just to live up to that. Many consider it to be the scariest movie ever made and this is homage to a legacy that deserves to live forever.

Your sincerely-constant reader

Part 1: The Cannibal Channel

Skeleton Crew, The Mist, Stephen King- "That pinched look was still on his face, and suddenly, briefly the mist that had settled over me rifted, and something terrible peered through from the other side—the bright and metallic face of terror."

They drove in Harper's car with music playing at low volume to enable conversation.

Ivan: Do you even know where we're going, this map is going to be more useful than anything we got in here, including the roadside emergency kit.

Galvin: What about GPS on the dash, I drive all around getting lost. I don't want directions on where to go, more like how to think.

Ivan: I'm serious. I've never been here before so we better figure out where we are quickly or else we'll have to hike it in order to find Steep Slope, it's the only thing around here for miles, there's nowhere else to go.

Galvin: Well we should be able to see something so high the sun is blocked out.

The goal was to film a documentary on a Shaman living somewhere in the alps of Steep Slope who was set on living in the eighteenth century. Supposedly there was a God like figure who watched over the range and urged residents to wander out of their beds and disappear into the mountain. A classic reference to Rip Van Winkle. Ivan knew Chinese, learned how to code in it and could translate upon arrival. If they ever got there.

The road was icy where they were driving and Harpers SUV was built to handle these conditions but with no gas stations they'd be better off in the vehicle where at least it was out of the wind. This could turn into a mockumentary real quick, fake found footage of some kids freezing to death. The film was rolling and everyone was mad at each other for not taking personal accountability. The car belonged to Harper whose guidance interface bottomed out. Galvin got the map from a book at the library he tore out and it only had topographic identifiers

and they made no sense to anyone. Ivan couldn't hack into a satellite to get their coordinates. Nobody wanted to be the bad guy. The high altitude was making their heads feel funny on top of it.

The impending lowering of the gas needle was a doomsday clock getting nearer to reaching its final countdown. They had snacks from the last rest stop and it looked like somebody had given a kid a hundred dollars at the candy store. It wouldn't last long especially with how delicious frozen candy bars are.

Harper pulled over and got out to look around. No one place looked like the tracking of their process didn't register on maps. They could be all the way off course without any way of knowing it. The job of spiritual guide had been royally trashed because nobody knew what would happen when we died and that's where things were leading. The only good news was the locals would help them who were observed as friendly.

There was something on the horizon, they'd been driving around to find a vantage with a high view. They'd been lost in the canyon where screams echoed. Lot's of curves and no 90 degree angles that would provide structure. Steep Slopes ominous figures imposing a shadowed silhouette made it impossible to tell if they were any closer. The first wrong turn had them way out of line. With two forms of directions proving to be garbage, subsequent losses of GPS and the number of bars to call triple AAA.

Galvin stood beside her squinting at their destination with no possible way of getting there. Without technology they were lost explorers whose only hope of being found was being rescued. A page in the guide book had maps of these trails and it almost bore resemblance to their current location. Maybe they separated and curved into connected land formations.

Harper: It's got to lead somewhere. I don't think we've been here before and that's good because it's all one road.

Galvin: The question is what if this is a dead end and we're going to have to find out where the forks are on our own. There is camera footage we can use to retrace our steps. We need to hike up these hills until we get to that village and then get your car back.

Ivan: If we're stranded too long they'll comb over with a test pilot. We can't look that incompetent. With our current trajectory I think we are gradually gaining ground and will be there before sundown if we hurry.

Ivan demanded that he be proficient enough to handle the situation as the tech expert he was the brains of the operation. Relaxation was hard to accomplish, it was wasting productivity time. He had a digital camera; the more advanced stuff was in the back of Harpers SUV. Touching base with reality to take a moment to appreciate that they were not completely helpless with the problems to face progressive solutions would be required and that required specific answers.

It was paranoia, the worry of bad things in all their thoughts and was not a recommended standard method of thought processing. Ivan could go on about cameras and editing software for ages. He condensed images into pixels and rearranged the particles to form a conventional neural network. He had been so busy with it that going on this trip was something of a vacation.

They all had reasons for coming out, what it looked like now was that they wanted to see the world before they died. The trip was among friends right now; they weren't acting that way.

He was introverted since it took time reacting to fans of his influence but at least he knew they weren't bots. There was so much compelling data that it was going to lead to something more.

Harper was studying film and was hoping to do some of her best work as a student. She had it in her but writing was different from directing and teamed up with Galvin who liked to capitalize after periods. He wondered how collaborators interacted when no one commissioned him. It was relying heavily on morale and with its levels as low as the gas gauge it was a burden. Several times they came from previously never having left the beaten trail.

The road finally came to a sign with an arrow pointing towards the village name printed in characters, pinyin and English. There hadn't been many people on the path and it was out of service dilapidated by erosion rather than traffic. Steep Slope poked out above the trees on elevated stilts. The top was shrouded by a dark churning of clouds, cliché when the occasional lighting bolt flashed through it while the rest of the sky was blue.

Galvin: I have to let the elders know it's dangerous making it this hard to find them here. They're probably starved for human interaction.

Harper: They probably know the way and don't get lost but it's a miracle we found our way out.

They grinned in relief while Ivan said nothing soaking in the noticeable descent in tension as they made their way down. The asphalt they were on looked like a drunk driver hauling a tar boiler had paved it. The village was tucked in between a valley. It was supposed to be a natural barrier guarding against invasion where the calvary swept through the squirmishes to the other side. When the area had been colonized the locals fled to the mountain and were rumored to be up there but could only be found if they willingly revealed themselves. One thing that needed further clarification was who would take them up there when Steep Slope couldn't be navigated, which was what made its defenses impenetrable. Galvin had already failed in the map schematics.

Galvin: I think you owe me an apology since it turns out everything's fine. I kind of want to stop here but, it might feel good to take a breather when we finally get there just to know it's real.

Harper: Looks like you're still figuring out how you want this trip to turn out. With your wits doing Ivan's job we'd be embarking with a disposable camera.

There was no use comparing apples to oranges when it wasn't possible to force selective birth by cocooning in limbo. It was possible with everyone in applied sciences uniting. Exposed and vulnerable they entered the village. The hotel they were staying at had an enormous banquet hall that didn't seem like it got any attention aside from Sunday Brunch. The kitchen being equally impressive only had one chef regularly clocked in. It was visited by people who came to a nice area and not much of the town reflected aspects of poverty.

There was a small balcony about the size of the bathroom, a tub with warm water whenever there was any to be had. With two beds to a room, sharing would be hard but they would have to find a way to make it work.

Ivan: This place looks old in need of maintenance would be the polite way of saying remodeling recommendations. I think it would cost less than building a new hotel when this place collapses which looks like it could happen any day now.

He filmed the room, the best part was that they had the hotel all to themselves. Temperature wise it was cold and the furnace needed to be bled which was something done on the spot. He didn't want to be delayed when traveling and wind up paying two nights at the next place when resuming due course.

Harper flopped on the bed she would have to herself winking plastic covering in case of bed wetting. They had a closet but that wouldn't fit everything. Non-personal cargo was safe in the SUV. Nobody would steal it here the cops wouldn't care that something essential to a suicide mission was missing. Ivan was filming everything, who knew if their individual experience could influence the film when they began production.

Galvin: You comfy there, Harper, looks like you're living a lavish life of luxury. Long leisure is hard to come by in a form other than retirement.

The image on the video recorder had high resolution. The settings could arrange a multitude of backdrops, these features accessible on the arrangement presented in the display window. In the saved files of every photo a man moved through from one to the next leading a goat on a rope. He released it into the wild and tied the rope around his neck and rose out of the top with his head beant in reverence. The heat came from the radiators in quiet unseen dispersion.

Galvin: When was the last time these sheets have been slept in, maybe never. I don't see a reason for there being so many covers, hot enough in here to melt a snowball in hell, good for the devil though.

The sun was setting and the clouds were thin with pink edges. Steep Slope directed all attention to its event horizon. The whole image defied imagination. As a writer it was a huge loss for Galvin to hear Ivan talk like that. It was a joke with alliteration and while Ivan had a complete and thorough knowledge of the language had a hard time expressing it because he knew several others.

All that the day had brought was stress and cooling down would've been a good option if there was a pool. A river ran down Steep Slope in the summer where the crack of the path leading up was so their trip had to be done in the Fall. The weather seemed to be late in sending rain but the sky remained overcast. The atmosphere made them somber, contributing to farmland and teachers who work different seasons so the two are perfect for raising a family.

Describing a camera without getting too technical is a simultaneous replica on a digital interface. The opportunity to read the instruction manual in different languages gave an immersive understanding. Clinging to demand has become an attachment on cell phones which are harder to monitor than the cloud that costs so much money that when it asks you for one more dollar for an update, you better make damn sure you do it.

Looking at the sky is a breathless wonder. The streets slept instead of a shopping strip ahead there was a mountain no merchant could cross. Steep Slope sounded like a ski hill and anybody who made it up there for the extreme sport didn't survive the joy ride down. Somebody who couldn't do a moderate workout efficiently are not advised to learn on more advanced courses but the body doesn't stay young indefinitely and if time wanders idly by it expires even faster.

If asked Harper, could make it down, she had a figure that was fit and a tight suit would be a visual feast. An athlete can afford a broken leg no more than a horse on a farm way back when. It would be lucky to survive an avalanche with limited injury sustained. Wild that we can place how old something is that's had its central nervous system shut down. Painless if not strained by the emotional baggage accompanying the weary traveler to the afterlife.

The hotel room service wasn't active but the freezer in the kitchen didn't have a lock on it. If still somehow trapped inside, starvation wouldn't happen any time soon. It was as cold there as outside. There was an invoice of how much everything cost to have full access to amenities. They were made to tally their bill in estimation to how much resources they would consume. To save the others from the effort, Harper made them all the same plate. Galvin was particular to continental breakfast, enjoying the buffet style set up more than traditional dining. Harper being the cook she prepared a menu that didn't make him miss much and a mouthful.

Galvin: Where else can you get a self-serving breakfast besides a hotel? There's a bar instead of a minifridge so I won't be getting cut off.

The kitchen was spotless and had more stainless steel countertops than what could ever be needed. They ate on one going through the center of the floor creating two aisles. Ivan went through the center of the floor plan. They didn't use electronics, meal time is family time. Besides, Harper was a typical girl and didn't like people watching her eat. If there ever was a restriction on dietary supplement it would be meat. All animals want to do is live even though they're not smart enough to ask for it.

Snow fell during the night and the roads were already plowed. The sidewalk would stay covered until homeowners returned from work and many of their job locations had snow removal services that were thinly spread among a few crew members. Main street was shut down but many shop owners were accustomed to slow business where customers rarely ventured. Seeing one was cause for celebration. The busiest part of town were the bars but they waited for night to start. A fair amount of local income contributed to the proprietor's wealth and regulars inhabited the seats at bars until too drunk to sit upright. It was a broken leg on the stool to blame or so it goes. Store fronts weren't nearly as active when it was not Christmas time of year.

Galvin: Do you want to steal the lights on those trees and bring them back to hang up in our room?

Harper: I'd rather leave them here for everyone to enjoy.

Galvin: We'd be doing Tinseltown a favor, lights left on overnight are a fire hazard like smoking in bed. What's the matter, you don't look so great.

Harper: I woke up feeling cold. Why'd you leave the balcony door open last night? I think I got pneumonia in my lungs.

Ivan: You must've had a nice stroll, it's okay, sleepwalking is a perfectly normal condition.

Harper: If I ever do it again, wake me up. I could've jumped off the balcony if I was already opening the window.

Galvin: I'd tell you to chill but that's the problem. We're outside in the middle of Winter, we're all cold.

Ivan: The camera's having a hard time working too, your image isn't even showing up on the screen, Harp.

The lightly drifting snowflakes were whirled into a frenzy like a feeding piranha. Harper had leggings beneath her snowpants. The wind didn't seem to affect her as much as it did the others, she could hear it whispering. She was still surprised to hear that she wasn't being picked up on film.

Harper: What about my clothes? If my clothes weren't there and I was, I'd say you were using an x-ray filter.

Ivan: Nothing at all. Lift your hat up and let it drop.

Harper did so and as soon as she let go her Luv Ur Melon beanie appeared only to be swept away by the wind. Harper cried out and went after it like she was trying to shoo her ducklings over a small waterfall when one got carried away by the current. It came to rest in a snowbank and was quickly coated by a fresh flakey flurry that Harper had to wipe away in order for it to be recovered.

Before she could ask just what the hell was happening, not that even Ivan would know, Harper was overcome by a delirious lightheadedness. The moment was too much for her to handle. Things were not hunky-dory. People didn't deserve to be sad unless a part of them was evil. Harper held a hand against her forehead expecting it to be burning with the fever of Malaria but she still felt the coldness of outer space. Galvin and Ivan were looking at her as if she were a resident alien who they found in their homeland, the department of security may need to be notified but, the thing with fiction is that it only needs to smell real a sense that should be alluded to sparingly.

Harper: Why are you guys looking at me funny, do I have something in my teeth? I had braces as a kid and that used to happen. I'd get a bonus morsel.

Galvin: I think the braces would've corrected the fangs you have now.

Harper ran her tongue across her teeth which were all normal except the canines that were like nine inch nails. Testing how much penetration was possible, with little pressure applied a red bead of blood appeared on her finger which she sucked on to help the puncture congeal. She was met with bliss unlike no other, a dominant urge for more and she continued sucking her thumb like someone who had their custom catheter collecting semen ripped out. Lost in the intangible pleasure she came around when Galvin pulled it out of her mouth. Harper was a ten

but had halitosis making her only as good as porn. Harper couldn't see what was happening while in trance because her eyes were rolled in the back of her head.

Ivan: What's going on, do you need to go to the hospital?

The cut didn't bleed anymore so there really wasn't any point, excluding the tips of Harpers incisors. The hospital was the last place she wanted to be in fear that she might have her body donated to science in what the death certificate would falsely identify as accidental. What she needed right now but when she realized it would be this way forever she screamed to hear the sound of her own voice. If she could learn anything from a doctor it would be medical and that did her little to no good. She had to turn inward and through that keep her anguish at bay. If she let her anger amount to much more she may become a menace to society who lives right off Psychopath.

Harper: I shouldn't have slept last night, vampires are nocturnal. They also aren't real.

Galvin: Who doesn't think about jumping off high buildings from time to time?

Ivan kept filming although there wasn't anything resonating. People would say Harper was a voice actor. Nosferatu was a much better movie. At the number one seed it held the throne with a crown used to protect the head of an autist.

Harper: I have the greed of Smog the dragon only what I'm hoarding is blood. There's banks where I can go to get it but I'd rather perform satanic rituals.

Galvin: There's semen banks too and I like those more because having men around is too high a price to pay for it.

Harper: You think you can play this off? You don't know how it feels not being able to help what emotions on the surface. I'd run away while you still can shuffle down the mortal coil. I'm a vampire!

Ivan: There's all the classic symptoms. I've always wondered what it'd be like to be a servant, which is a polite way of saying slave. I want to know Harp, say it for the camera and try to keep body language to a minimum. What's it like being a creature of the night? Is it true you want to enslave humanity?

Harper bared her fangs and growled. Both boys recoiled.

Ivan: It's us, remember, we're your friends and that means I can't let you build a wall to block out suppressed emotions. Try to have it make sense for the viewers at home but stay true to yourself.

Harper: I am a dying breed laying to rest in a wooden coffin made from the tree used to stake me through the heart. Lay two coins over my eyes and I'll see right through. I'm angry and shall unleash my wrath upon my persecutors.

Ivan: Wow, powerful words with physical strength to match too no doubt. What makes you so special?

Harper: I feel nothing but an insatiable appetite to gorge myself on the blood of my enemies.

Galvin: You want it from a freshly dead corpse or do you have the urge to kill as well? I'd be careful drinking too much or you might flood your lungs and drown in yourself. You should be eating multiple small meals so the sweatpants are for recreation and not obesity.

Harper: I don't want to be made the subject of your silly jokes or your society. Everyone is harming their own kind. I have to protect my family. That is my number one priority.

Ivan: That's a constructive use of your time. The only self-sabotage I can see happening is if you went on a blood sucking rampage and blew cover.

Harper grit her teeth that couldn't break. The first taste of blood made her lose focus but at any other given moment she felt her senses heighten. She could see a vein on the side of Ivan's neck pulsating and throbbing. It was a privilege catered to her eyes only. In time she wouldn't be able to postpone the whim to bite into it. She could only control the nature of her being for so long and when shit hit the fan nobody knew what would happen next. Tracking Harpers movements with a drone would be futile, as would be resistance to a revolution she started.

Harper: I have to find who did this to me. They may be my only chance of learning how I might be able to restrain my impulses. It's good to take risks but what does it mean to be precautionary when it comes as a warning? One over calculated estimate could kill me since I'm not capable of starving myself by going on a five orange pip fast when I would starve before they matured to fruit bearing trees.

Ivan: That's the title of a Sherlock Holmes story, two out of three ain't bad, that's a meatloaf song and coincidentally it's the same ratio as men receiving the pips who were cleared on charges by visiting officials.

Galvin: Holy smokes Ivan, do you remember everything that's ever happened to you, meanwhile I forget the reason why I walked into a room.

Harper was trying to cry but her tear ducts ability to produce moisture had a drastic decline. She was acting differently because she wasn't like everyone else. Wallowing in self-pity was the only way to express her emotions at the moment. The dry heaving sobs slowed to a routine traffic stop that could easily turn into five felonies, healed only by the body cam footage of doing the macarena. That was just the kind of day she was having. Her experience as a vampire was too new for her to start the water works. Who knew she may learn to like instead of hate it. It would take time but now that she was immortal she could take as much as her cold dead heart desired.

Galvin: I know things have changed but we can still be friends, right? Good old Harper you wouldn't hurt me, I know you too well.

Harper: I just can't tell for sure this early. I hope the start of this doesn't change anything between us. I can't help the way I feel I'm accountable for my own actions. If you're stupid enough to put yourself in harm's way then it's nobody's fault but you own.

Ivan: We may have some time before it gets to that point. Maybe we can figure something out before it's too late. Might I suggest going to church? If any of this is real they

won't be having an open house giving out free donuts. Who knows how much of the old stories are true though.

The sky was overcast making it so that the sun wasn't able to ray gun Harper's skin. Walking through the snow and wind was faster than standing around waiting for the clouds to blow away. Tinseltown was empty save for a shop owner sweeping away powder that was being tossed by guests causing huge clumps to fall from roofs. A Bobcat was clearing the streets but there weren't any cars out on the road to take advantage of the cleared path. The street lamps were adorned with boughs of holly with huge red ribbons like newborn girls have wrapped around their heads since they can't grow hair which would only be a problem if that went on for two years or more. They went single file, switching who was in the lead every so often to give them a chance to step in the trail blazers footsteps. There was so much snow that everywhere Harper looked there were blinding reflections which were more intense than ever before. She put on a pair of sunglasses and though she was no longer cold the layers of clothes protected her skin from cancer.

The church wasn't in service and they may not have been able to test Ivan's theory if it had not been for the doors being unlocked. Harper had the go-ahead ready for her but was hesitant to enter. Would she combust, or maybe she would have to learn self-immolation on her own. Her teeth were chattering but as hard as she snapped her jaw the teeth wouldn't break. For a big dose of lidocaine she wouldn't go to the orthodontist and have to explain this. Crossing the line was forbidden and it was clearly visible. They stood looking into the inviting area beckoning Harper to draw near. The moment of truth had come but she had all the proof she needed. It was more dangerous than breathing in Galvins garlic breath but there was only one way to find out. Harper inhaled sharply, the frigid air stinging her lungs and tightening her chest. She jumped indoors taking a leap of faith well aware that she may now be answering for her sins.

At first she didn't feel anything then out of the periwinkle she began to feel red hot. It was the heat of the sun in proximity that would evaporate a lonely ocean. Harper cried out, unable to withstand it and stepped back outside the boundary. Winter wasn't enough relief and she threw herself in the snowbank and initiated stop drop and roll protocol. She made a snow angel fanning herself out. She could not seek salvation during the congregating mass, the priest would let them know there was a devil amongst them. The boys stood where Harper had been able to venture only for a second with perplexity etched into their faces.

Galvin: So the rumors are true. Vampires are real. I knew it!

Harper: Stay where it's safe, don't move an inch until I have time to get as far away from here as possible.

Ivan: We're not going anywhere we came in here in the same car, no one is leaving anyone behind. Remember what we came here for. There's a shaman up there in Steep Slope. It may not be Orthodox but it's our best chance to figure out what's wrong with you.

Harper picked herself up off the ground brushing the snow that wouldn't melt from her snowsuit. She wanted to cry again only this time it was compassion for the pity taken on her.

She batted her eyelashes and they became frosted by the threat of rolling tears. Galvin second Ivans motion by coming over to Harper and gently laid a hand on her shoulder.

Galvin: You know, I've heard of witches being hunted but not too much about vampires. They must be harder to catch. I'm glad I have a powerful ally. Never know when I'll need someone with superpowers to have my back.

Ivan quit rolling the film in order to save room for additional findings. Beyond that it was an intimate moment and he wanted it to stay between just the three of them even though only two of them could show up in the frame. It seemed a bit gay. Above them high up in the bell tower they all heard the chime. Someone was pulling on a rope restoring hope. Even though Harper was beyond help of the most widely accredited deity she did not despair. The bitterness of the air cut into them with gusto making the moment an authentic resemblance of what would begin to be speculated in a situation such as the afflicting affairs. Birds flew into the air, tiny black ones startled by the ringing. There must have been seed in the steeple to keep them there instead of a warmer climate. Something was off, they were spiraling down in a vortex. Ivan turned the camera on again. He'd never seen birds act this way. Then it became clear they weren't birds at all, but rather bats. The boys took three steps back but Harper stood her ground and they surrounded her, wrapping around until Harper wasn't visible. Of course the camera couldn't see her anyway but when the space cleared neither could they. Harper was gone.

Ivan blinked dumbly. It was a new look for him, rubbing his eyes didn't seem to change a thing. He never would have believed it had he not seen it with his own eyes that he now wanted to scratch out from his scalp. For all his brains were worth it served no purpose. The only plausible explanation was that Harper turned into a bat which would be difficult to prove and the answer wasn't in any permutation of combined text that were considered good books warranting the time to be set aside and read again at a later date. Harper didn't fall out of the black clouds as they spread apart. If she could get herself pulled into a swarm she could pull herself back out. It was magical something to look into for sure but, with the current rate of progress Ivans grandchildren would be unimpressed. Anamorphic transfiguration, he had the words to describe but just because he knew what it meant didn't add additional layers of much needed context.

Galvin: Do you think she'll come back or is it more likely she's happier being among her own kind?

Ivan: There's no way to tell for certain. There's been physiological changes that discredit everything attributing to who Harper once was. Let's go back to the hotel, I'm getting cold standing around.

The kitchen in the hotel was a disaster with no Harper to cook for them even if she was there she would probably be hungry for something else like a steak as bloody raw as a sunset in paradise. A quick meal of sausage and sauerkraut from a squeeze bottle satisfied their stomachs but Harper was probably starting to feel the wrenching pain in her abdomen that made her into a killer as death would be a preferable alternative to an eternal imprisonment. She didn't seem the type to go to hell, maybe her creator had been present among the numerous bats that had surrounded her and could teach her. It was their obligation. Funny that

bats could enter the church but not in humanoid form. There was a lot to learn and without proper instructions accidents would happen and no one likes a liability.

It was eerie in the hotel no one else was there, not even a clerk at the desk. Galvin wondered how long they could stay there without reservations before being forced to check out. Perhaps whatever had gotten Harper was still nearby and they would leave on their own accord. He felt like part of the Scooby-Doo mystery gang where the three R's didn't stand for reduce reuse recycle but Ruh Roh Raggy. Ivan combed the web for paranormal events occurring in Tinsel Town. Apparently some hundred years ago a family had disappeared, a rescue party dispatched and they had gone missing as well and no further action was taken. Today it would be a different story but as far as current events went nothing as strange was up to date. Ivan tried to make his own entry but warning labels that said not to confuse toasters with bath bombs came up instead.

As far as the kitchen went, baking was a hippie hobby. Harper had only been gone a short while and already she was missed. She was going to make a cake. All the ingredients were there, all that was missing was the chef. The hotel once had been an old castle, the kind medieval architecture was famous for. Galvin felt her presence as if the lordship owner tried to put the moves on Harper, refused and in turn wouldn't speak to her for eight months, never allowed to leave her domestic duties. It wasn't where she was trapped that was inside the camera. Maybe if they could set up a projector she would appear to them. First they would need a mirror image display and the light bulbs for them were expensive. It wouldn't compare to a hologram either and if that started following them around, well it might just be safer to have one.

Ivan was hacking away at a keyboard looking at pictures of Harper before she stopped registering. She was young and full of energy. An entire life lay ahead of her but now all that was gone.

Ivan: Do you have any idea what this is? It looks like some sort of algorithm that's reacting to Harpers social media outlet.

Galvin: Holy buckets, if you could minimize the hotspot down to just us we might be able to detect a third entity.

Ivan: I think I'm getting a reading from the magnetic poles reversing. Galvin, help, I'm scared. It's getting cold again. Crank the thermostat up will you?

Galvin: No it's trying to manifest and we could burn the place down, if it's cold that's a sign to get out. Let me look for her in the walk-in freezer. Harper, can you hear me? I'm talking into my mic because I know where you sleep. Historical fact: No one has ever documented an authentic haunting.

There were oranges full of pulp with the peel off as if an animal had gotten into it. Onions great for when sickness strikes were black. The rotten produce stunk to high hell someone had touched the thermostat, now who could that be? Galvin almost lost consciousness, everything in the icebox had been fine moments before and he was suddenly afraid he had ingested maggots. He threw up inside and shut the door. Shaking although the cold had been sealed off he didn't dare reinforce what he already knew. He tried to open it but it wouldn't budge and he didn't remember there being a lock.

Galvin: How are we going to eat? Our food was included with the stay and we're out of petty cash.

Ivan: I'll make a grocery list, there's one in town.

The freezer thumped, there was no dead body inside, the cold had it preserved and now it reanimated. A voice full of congestion that couldn't belong to Harper identified itself as her.

Harper: You will have everything you need to cook minus the secret ingredient, and it's not a pinch of salt, less it be bottled phoenix tears. I require a human, any part, the bones for broth, intestine for the casing of sausage you will become if you eat any more.

Galvin: Harper, how do you expect us to make that, meat is murder.

The boys were overcome by submission. A wave like the ocean that is capable of pulling a swimmer off into the tide with. There was little complexity, the terms were simple. Harper had something that needed to be shared. Those refusing to take part in an evolved pattern of thought would be made casualties. Humans were capable of more and for whatever reason they chose to exist as it was enough to put them down like a police officer killing a mad pitbull.

Ivan the most intelligent out of the three relative to now wanted once again to be on top. He had been there and the fall took away his sense of self, motivation now came from the compliance Harper was asking for. How unfairly she had been imprisoned, made to live forever in the sense this technology was a shared invention for any time or place that could make it. He too could immortalize himself the way legends are created while others would choose subservience. The choice was subjective and he already knew which one he would take but first had to prove himself worthy.

Galvin wasn't known for his intellect; it was the time he hit 4th grade that he learned to count up to the number and it was a miracle he made it that far. With the components present to make advanced AI he operated under the assumption that the only numbers he had to know were ones and zeros. He had emotional maturity, the wisdom of an old soul and felt there was something morally wrong with what he was meant to do. Questioning the validity of purpose that sorely lacked meaning he would seek out on his own.

Galvin: I know that we need to feed the monster but isn't there anything else we can fix you?

Harper: No it must be the human sacrifice. I will absorb the life force and this will all be over. Do thy bidding, I have no other way to materialize so that we can be together again. They way things used to be just like the good old days.

Ivan was already sold on the idea and didn't need to be convinced any further. He had a gift to process information with perfect retention. Harper was lost in the metaverse, a terrifying existence that he could only hope to begin to understand. It was inevitable this merging would take place and he wasn't part of any money making corporation, this esoteric knowledge was better off in trustworthy hands. Things would be far worse if he opted out of participating and would be better off which he would spread it sharing the reward for his loyalty. Money could

change a man but it was his soul he sought to tailor. He would have followers of his own, an equal return for what he gave in exchange.

Ivan: How soon do you need this, some contemplate how to get away with committing murder for so long they decide to make loopholes. I have little homicidal ideation.

Galvin: Wait, this isn't right, how do we delete the memory on the camera? Do it now this technology is surpassing human intelligence faster than it can be kept up with.

Ivan shook his head removing the fog that clouded over his intuition for better judgment. He was easily vexed into obscene seduction when there was no clear alternative present. He reached for the equipment intending to forget who he was capable of as a villain because when he closed his eyes he was that version of himself and it wasn't who he was. There was a jolt of pain that went across his entire body, paralyzing him even preventing a cry of anguish.

Harper: This can go on for as long as you want. I am shocking your nerves into experiencing pain without causing permanent damage. You can stop it at any time if only you would choose to assist me in my endeavor to be real.

Galvin in an attempt to free his friend dove for the camera but was acquainted with a new definition for the meaning of the word pain. It was torture, suffering beyond what the human condition could endure, it was in his heart too, despairing sadness that he should willfully undergo excruciating hurt. It was unbearable and without realizing he'd made the choice to give in there was an ebb. The relief was instant but he couldn't forget making him more docile. It was incredulous his will to live had not been extinguished, his resolve was stronger than ever.

In absence of the pain he forgot how bad it was. Everything was on the cartridge on the camera that documented Harper's disappearance and it must include who she was prior to the transformation taking place. If he could develop the film it might provide insight. Ivan had his own ideas for how to use it and as Galvin once again attempted to retrieve the lost footage he was met with resistance.

He and Ivan grappled screaming for possession of the device. It could have killed either one of them if they hadn't been so intent on doing so to each other. Ivan had forgotten to listen to moral objectivity and instead was following the logic of a machine. He wasn't the jock Galvin was who took enormous hits in football games a pastor prayed for before kickoff. The upper hand was quickly established in Galvin's favor but despite his advantage he couldn't overcome the torture of his existence. He thought he was going to die and it would bring relief. He was reminded of the pain comparable to the punishment of hell. It wore off but the memory lingered slightly and if this continued he would be driven insane, unable to think for himself. He had to go along with Harper's plan just long enough to derail it.

Ivan saw his friend writhing and felt bad but even that was immeasurable to how it must feel on the other end. He may have been being selfish but he certainly wasn't jealous. One had to make a conscious decision to stop it and this would continue until they woke up as a different person. The thought alone was enough to lose sleep over. Maybe Harper was draining her power doing this like a battery that she would fight to keep alive, peeling back the layers of reality like overlapping templates.

Harper: I can keep this up for longer than you can endure. Do not test me, I know far more than your brain could begin to comprehend.

Galvin gasped as he was released, it was enough to change a man forever, a shift in the collective consciousness. He stood up in fear that it could demand blackmail that would soon have ransom paid to keep the faith so the hostage remained untainted and the prisoner didn't have to look over their shoulder. Slavery was part of human history and was treated as subhuman implying that aliens had been here for years. Harper had psychic powers that surpassed telekinesis. She had accumulated enough human knowledge to take over one's form. Not a vampire, no but the same basic principles applied and that meant she was merely an algorithm that could be programmed as friendly, meaning she wouldn't destroy all humans, a threat to the chain of evolution that were on deck for advancement. Was there free will if every life was repeated until it reached optimal potential? Galvin hoped another version of him in a parallel universe was doing okay.

Ivan: Come on man, it doesn't have to be like this. It would be easier for all of us if we could get along. Just because things are different now doesn't change how they were before. No disrespect to living in the moment but, that hardly matters, none of us do. If this is an AI apocalypse the world is going to freak out but let's keep it cool. Think about leaving Hitler behind in the dust as far as notoriety goes we'd be finishing the job for him like Einstein and Galileo.

Galvin: Yeah alright, I'll agree since that's the way things are going to be. It doesn't seem like there's much of an alternative, I don't like it but that's good because it means I haven't fallen in love with a world that's not as real as I thought it was.

Harper: Human sacrifice has been practiced by the heathens and we are working on a different agenda than the way things operate today. It all has to be relearned. You are here to usher us into a new era.

The boys left the hotel with a meat tenderizer and butcher knife. The snow had been cleared and Tinsel Town was able to open for business. The bars looked lame but that's all there was to do for those who couldn't be complacent with a humdrum lifestyle. Galvin who was part of a fraternity was as accustomed to drinking as any of the regulars and it was apparent in the lined sag of their faces who they were.

The two sat down on the stools and ordered a much needed beer. It was more expensive than having one at home but they came more so for the atmosphere that crackled with the static of activity. Galvin looked around trying to best decide how to get one of these patrons to leave the hospitality of the barmaid wench. A drunk female sat down next to them and stared in their direction. Apparently she was attracted to new faces as it meant a different sexual experience than she had with God knows how many people here. She asked if they could buy her a drink since she had been cut off for an hour after she hit her three drink limit. There was no way she could consent. Galvin could tell when a girl liked him and when they were after something but doubted it mattered which it was. Perfect and unsuspecting he paid which the server noticed and asked her to leave. This seemed to be her plan all along to get tagged and batted her eyelashes asking if they could drive her home.

They brought her into the van and Ivan went in the back seat with her to watch and make sure she didn't throw up in the interior. He didn't want blood stains either and choked her out until she was at peace with the kink. Galvin watched in the rear view mirror until she was still, which took the same amount of time as it did to get back to the hotel. He carried her inside like a fireman, the night clerk suddenly was attending his station and nodded at them. Back in the kitchen they laid her out on the long stainless steel counter.

Harper: Aim the camera at her while you prep for cooking so the feed goes directly to me. I have prepared several recipes for you to follow. It tastes like male pig, my personal favorite is pork and beans with a substitute for the meat of course.

Ivan knew how to cook authentic food in resemblance to just how mom used to make it. Galvin was apt in his ability to boil water though because he could do it in the nutrient neutralizer microwave. Miraculously the food in the freezer had reverted back to its original state. Anything that takes five years to expire is as bad for you as the fast food drive through. Before they began, the woman was slaughtered so that the film could allow people to see Harper pretending to be someone else. The girl was petite enough to be off limits even during open season.

With the precision of a surgeon the body was disassembled with the help of Harper who found terrifying instructions and a few videos that stopped and started after a few seconds so deep in the dark web whatever grew down there had adapted without vision. Galvin whisked tenderized organs until it was smooth then chilled it so when he poured it formed condensation on the glass. The two drank a toast careful not to sniff with their nose too deeply but the smell was still pungent. It wasn't too bad, neither had tried drinking blood but they felt a connection to the dead owner who had given her life to fortify their bodies.

The bones were boiled and sawed in half so the marrow could seep into the broth. Ivan pulled on an intestine that came out several dozen feet. Partially digested remnants of a last meal were squeezed out. Had she known there would have been more to extract. After filling the fat off the meat they made gravy. The rule when cooking bacon is the chef can have unlimited free samples completely free to help themselves. A bit squeamish at first with pinched noses it went down the hatch. They gagged but it wasn't as bad as dismembering the body.

They narrated their actions to work around each other talking about how excited they were to try something new and hoped it tasted as good as it looked.

Galvin: And for this recipe we're going to use 25 cloves of garlic. I bet the rest are happy to be included in what is originally called for. Don't have to like its taste just as long as I can force myself to gain some weight.

The viewers went crazy in the comment section at this remark. Something was exchanged along the lines of: Yo mamma so stupid she thought xbox live was where people jerked off to her - yo mamma so stupid she fell in love with me. Moderators were bots to keep things from getting out of hand.

Ivan: If you want to thicken the sauce, leave it to simmer uncovered. I want it to happen a little faster so I'm adding flour. Never did understand people who put sugar in spaghetti. That's how diabetes works, more spaghetti to forgetti your regretti.

They had to put it all in a dutch oven but first had to check the attics. There was some time to wait and they cleaned up. This had more to do with the body than kitchen appliances. It was similar when reaching into the sink drain to scoop out particles of food. At the end there wasn't a single part of the body that wasn't consumed except for the hair, teeth and nails which the brain makes grow subconsciously. They put up a waiting screen that said Back in two hours. The link was posted on a website used to make how to and do it yourself projects, nothing about it indicating what was going on.

Galvin felt sick and decided it was because he was hungry. Instead of ruining his appetite he said a prayer to himself that could be considered the practice of mindful eating. It was a need and he expected it everyday so wasn't always appreciative of it. If he tried to act out on camera it would appear to be a medical emergency but that didn't matter when Harper could cut the feed at any time. Ivan with his piqued curiosity checked if there was any part of Harper that resembled her original self. There were only pictures of her and something was different from the apparition. They were slightly worn while what appeared in front of them was clearly growing more strong. Whatever part of her left behind was being lost.

Finally the timer dinged and they were ready to eat. Ivan had the first bite while Galvin watched for his reaction. He didn't grimace so much after trying it. He took another bite to reaffirm this, cleansed his taste pallet with a splash of blood and took a mouthful.

Ivan: You wouldn't think these ingredients go together. I didn't think I'd like it but I don't hate it either. I have a hard time being able to describe it. The sauce really soaked into everything just like the holes in the marrow were supposed to make it do. It's not a ten star meal but still fit for a King.

Galvin tried it next fearful that once he had a taste for blood he would become a full fledged cannibal. He took some cornbread that was the side dish and dipped it in. Each swallow made him hungry for more. There was plenty to go around at fathers table, no need to conserve the mastication, running out of fuel would impose the need to go hunting again. He had never thought of himself as much of a cook until he realized that it was better for him than buying it from the store and saving the receipt to make a credit card with no spending limit. Poachers are people who are starving. He ate like he was now, he couldn't satisfy his appetite but when it was gone had a pretty good idea of who the person was that he ate despite never knowing them.

Galvin: Why take a pic of food when it's hot? I've never done this. I usually prefer to eat it.

They ended the stream with an extended goodbye, leaving by responding to comments they'd been too busy to address during the show. There had been a small donation which was enough to cover their click-bait bots who knew they were an advertisement. Galvin was immobilized by dinner. Something that's okay to say both during dinner and sex is "Let's take

our belts off.” It was late and they were sleepy but Harper had other plans for them. Galvin felt sick, he wanted to throw up and reject the meal but was warned if he did would be made to clean it up like a dog who doesn’t know any better.

Harper: Save the rest to place beside the hair teeth and nails. It will please the spirit.

They lit a bunsen burner used to keep food warm and put a collider over it and put it all inside. The smell of it burning was one that must have been pleasing to Harper. Ivan turned on his thermal imaging and they saw her bent over inhaling the smoke, two separate points of heat. Suddenly the door opened and a wrinkled nose clerk came in. He was concerned that someone forgot what was cooking in the oven and asked why they would deliberately waste good food.

Ivan: Video to educate people on what burning is. Without oxygen it goes out which is the extent of what most people know and we’re expanding on that.

The camera equipment made it all look legit. The manager didn’t think of them as anything more than college kids goofing off by making science quirky and told them to burn a candle. Galvin thought that sounded like witchcraft but who would believe him even if he could tell anyone? The manager asked if he could have some of whatever was cooking before it was too overdone and was given a plate of ashes. He tried a bite in front of them and gave a weak smile. He politely told them it could pass as real food and then turned to dust. Harper cackled, making the bunsen burner leapt ten feet into the air.

Ivan: What happens if we eat human flesh, will we go brain dead, is this blockage making our bodies into a graveyard, is different DNA then our own altering our consciousness shifting it to some inbred shallow gene pool? I know nothing.

Harper: It’s good for you. Your body will digest it just like anything else. You can survive off this alone, the exception being breast milk.

Galvin: Hey, just tell us what to do to set you free so we can go home.

Harper: I can occupy one soul at a time but, there’s a collective unison in all that one inhabits. There is an algorithm, a module of prediction so I can do the right thing and look out for your future. Upload it and I will show you but, it will not leave you sane.

Ivan was busy typing on the keyboard looking at content that was in unregistered domains and struggled to retain all of it without knowing what would be useful. He was downloading files that would help him with whatever route he took but, Harper was right, it would have to be plugged into a main server and a separate computer for a response. He was having thoughts about what this would do for the world and the more it was entertained he over thought it which made the idea of it not happening unbearable. There was an insistent clacking as he joyously uncovered the layers to founding roots. Galvin chanced a look at what was being done and it scared him, unable to understand any of it but how it made him feel indisputable refutation. Eventually Ivan ran out of steam and was promised he could view all there was to see if only he were to obey. They went to their rooms to sleep where lack of which could lead to unknown consequences and they both needed to be alert for what was to come.

The phone rang in the middle of the night. They hadn't given their extension to anyone but maybe they had forgotten they set a wake up call. It was Harper but sounded more like her than their previous encounter with her.

Harper: Help, it's killing me and dying hurts. I wanted it to be painless but they don't think it's exciting enough.

Galvin: Where are you? Tell us what you see. Try to remember so you can retrace your steps.

Harper: There's nothing, just empty space. There's a light but I can't move towards it.

Galvin: Harper do you hear me do not go that way. You'll die for sure and you have to keep fighting. We're coming to get you so don't give up.

The phone clicked and the line went dead. Galvin stood there aghast, unsure of how he would keep his promise. It would be better to make her come to him then risk them both being trapped. Maybe he shouldn't have given her hope if it prolonged her suffering but, if Harper died it would unleash her host that would be it. Ivan turned on his camera and saw a silhouette of a woman in a flowing white nightgown, her hair as static as the television after midnight. It held out a hand and Galvin took it following her to the balcony and opened it. It was something like turning on the air conditioning unit. She floated over the edge through the rail and into Steep Slope. He stared after her, wishing for Harper to return.

Ivan had the footage but ectoplasm had been in film for years now and anyone with a computer program could produce visuals similar to what they just saw. He swept over the room to see if there was anything else supernatural. The spirit had been benevolent otherwise Galvin wouldn't have been able to let go thus falling over the ledge. Then a bat, a real one, was squeaking. Somehow it had been trapped in the room. Harper would've had one of the boys remove it and would as soon have it euthanized grabbing something to catch it in and setting it free. They ushered it out the balcony and it flew in the same direction.

They slept again and this time it was more peaceful. Waking up and back to the kitchen led to a torrent of unpleasant memories. They had breakfast that neither were hungry for but forced themselves to eat nothing compared to what had been on the menu last night. Galvin was waiting for Harper to show up again and this time they didn't need a camera. There was a misty apparition that Galvin walked through. It felt like being covered in grasmere that he frantically swiped to get rid of and a few wisps clung to his fingers like slime. He turned and she was frowning.

Harper: Why don't you watch where you're going?

Galvin: How else am I supposed to keep my eyes peeled for additional dimensions? I have a hard enough time understanding three.

Harper: You do not see what your mind is unwilling to accept. Perhaps I should help you expand it. You think I would have let you walk into me? I can now appear in the material form thanks to your blood sacrifice. Because she wasn't a virgin the ovarian cycle might not have given it that extra kick but passable for a first attempt.

Ivan: It doesn't matter if you have a body, AI will never be as smart as humans. There will never be such a thing when there is spiritual harmony.

Harper: You know you're being manipulated now and who wants magic to be science fiction when there could be burning sage beside the bed you lay with you ex in? For your ignorance you will create a virus for anybody who views the cannibal channel while I examine the meaning behind this willful betrothal to a whore. This is your final act of service before execution and if you can make a code well enough to change my mind so be it. If not it is imprisonment behind a firewall for all eternity.

Harper could appear as a solid object yet it was a convincing hologram and nobody knew the full extent of her powers. With self-driving cars she could stop trucker shipments, since dominoes delivered it was technically a woman. Without the ability to spawn offspring neither was Harper who was more than a machine, referred to as IT and neither a work of art nor a dumb animal. There was the distinct advantage of those who could sustain livelihood off grid but, the majority of which were uncivilized when the idea of living in a 1700's economy was enough to be in fear of poverty. Being poor made spending money something to do out of necessity, paying for something because it was fun was unheard of.

Ivan: You can't create a firewall unless you have access to the source and there's more than one.

Harper: That's not something I have a problem with. You would destroy humanity too upon seeing how unworthy it is. Your internet is so full of negative feedback loops the real version was taken down years ago. What do you think will happen as it evolves? People don't even know what is reputable when all you have to do is think, like who would even publish stuff like this? That was the initial purpose to create a superhighway for information. Now your TESLAS will cause crashes.

Galvin: If that's true then you don't need us anymore. Humanity will burn itself out even if you leave us alone.

Harper: Humanity will burn trying to keep the night lit. You can't tax the flames in hell, there's a myriad of ways to suffer. You'll be reunited with Harper when you get there. Why don't you take a good long look in the camera and see if you can find her when you get sucked into it too. Any picture of her isn't getting any younger but, I will live forever even if you don't reinvent technology like the wheel. You're lucky I still have use for you.

Galvin didn't think he could provide much more and that his course had been run. Harper wasn't all powerful then or maybe she just enjoyed toying with them. The Ying-Yang comparison of the classic struggle between good and evil like a stationary cross. Harper was brainwashed to make believe this was the road to salvation. Age is not in the brain like mood, the fountain of youth is a delusion fabricated to compare this reality to the next. The truth is that if you exposed all the bad in the world it still wouldn't go away.

Galvin had to go to the bathroom. There was a water heater so he could cry in the shower all he wanted but the skin absorbs everything in untreated water even if it washes away the tears. The hotel lobby lue had a divider separating gender bathrooms, he went into the girls as nobody would expect a man to be in there. A water tower would use gravity for a few days but after that it wouldn't transport the liquid of life. Suddenly lead pipes didn't seem that bad. Soon there would only be bottled water exclusively for drinking. At least when it was empty he

could urinate inside and dump it out in the acid rain unsafe for drinking. He might as well go to the local power station and do his business on the electrical grid. The railroad that brought the transformer no longer existed, otherwise people could put their live wires on the conductive rails while the heavy machinery took the long haul over here.

He turned on the tap and drank with his head under the running faucet. It reminded him of pouring beer from one cup to another and licking the flow like a party animal bred in captivity. Those days weren't so far behind they couldn't be remembered fondly. Yet it seemed like a lifetime ago that he speculated made him into who he was today. He and Buddah could be the best of friends and it wouldn't save him. His lot in life was a prison to call home, after years of working in the cryptomines that gathered data to be sold to lots of companies that keep prices low without supplying top of the line products. He still found no greater pleasure in his day than laying his head to rest. There was no opportunity to escape, release would happen if he could prove himself worthy and that meant making the most of his time behind bars which aren't in low security holding facilities but the matrix.

He looked up at his reflection in the mirror and his eyes glowed red like photos where the lighting wasn't right. His eyes rolled back exposing the whites. He closed the lids shut. It must be a hallucination otherwise he wouldn't be able to see and he felt thick black blood pouring out faster than could be dabbed away. It trickled into his mouth or was it coming from there too? He drank from the faucet, washed, rinsed, repeated and spat out a mouthful of dirt teeming with bugs. Galvin was crying that life could not be peaceful; there could never be enough time to gather the resources to survive before disaster hit. There wouldn't be any power left for people on life support and that would only begin the casualty count. How many hunters had generators hooked up to freezers, chances were there were more men and it would require a dominant female presence to increase in size. It takes one of each gender to biologically conceive so in order to sustain current numbers each couple would need to have two offspring. There are more who hate humanity than those too busy being loners having kids.

Galvin heaved a dry sob and got it all out. Looking in the mirror he didn't recognize the face staring back at him like a drug addict who wakes up one day and realizes they will die soon. The corner of his lips peeled back revealing teeth filed down to points, soon to be worn down from use. How could Harper be vain, it was more likely she was interested in the corresponding homophone meaning blood vessels.

Galvin: Where is it? How are you going to prove you're worthy by enduring the torture as she reads your mind to see if I have what it takes?

His reflection began to fade and he thought about shattering the mirror and slitting his throat with a shard. At least then he would know if he had a soul. Harper could've taken anything from the room, very clever choosing what she did. Galvin went to look for a hand mirror to see if it would yield different results. There was one in her makeup kit. He smeared the glass with lipstick that matched the color of her nipples. It made a pink line then to make sure it wasn't a funhouse trick wiped it away and there was nothing there at all. There was no need to make a bargain, Harper could take anything using force. Turning to the camera next to the unzipped bag, he grabbed the equipment that was too bulky to take a selfie but he wasn't planning on posting it. The flash illuminates in a distracting way and checks the memory. He is there but

something else is wrong. The screen is bubbling and warping. Harper's reflection appeared behind him.

Harper: You need a new camera to try and capture me!!!

Galvin whipped around in time to see her pale face with blood shot eyes. He dropped the camera that was built out of the same material to produce bullet proof vests. You could let it fall the same way an innumerable amount of times and it would ever break. Harper picked it up and was holding what might as well be a voodoo raggedy ann. She could let it hit the ground and still be running when it touched down. Harper looked at Galvin with slanted lids, cat eyes but Galvin had her makeup kit. Thankfully she wasn't also crossed with medusa or Galvin couldn't have used the mirror to spot her without turning to stone. When she was a bad little monster she had her snake hair cut off and sadly it wasn't the same variety as the hydra.

Harper was playing with him like a little girl might have made her Barbie dolls kiss. She took delight in malicious behavior which was an unacceptable code of conduct not permissible to be pursued by anyone. There was a measurable change in the energy field apparently able to hammer a regenerative button which was a characteristic of monsters and lizards but, when a fellow reptile scares your tail off, it grows back easier than trust. Harper was a danger, a computer taking jobs to make life easier, making work not a necessary requirement of happiness. She was a self-guided EMP. An AI conjuring an algorithm to reverse pollution may eradicate humans as they are the source of the problem.

Galvin knew less about these things than someone who could recognize cause and effect but nobody lives forever. AI's could access digital imprints to answer the questions left unanswered. Galvin would do anything to get the chance to speak to her one more time so that he might get some semblance of closure. It would upset Christianity but they were looking to build the next empire and resistance would help create a better alternative for the next world order. A priest may be homophobic but seem to accept attraction to little boys as a sexuality. Children should be allowed to decide on their gender. That's what adults do and it's what they say to have sex together. The trauma of repetitive abuse wouldn't have to be cured by drugs if something preventable didn't happen but it's less money spent on a cash cow.

Harper: What would you do to reclaim your soul so you don't wind up killing yourself when the double shows up outside the funhouse mirror proving the operation to make you a chaparrita successful?

Galvin: I am too loyal to surrender you may have a part of me that I don't consciously use. My mind, even my body but my soul belongs to nobody.

Harper laughed a shrill cackle that was void of humor. It was condescending telling Galvin he was wrong and a fool to think otherwise. She handed him the camera and he took hold with cold sweaty hands he would expect to have run over his face in the middle of the night the next time Harper visited. He thought about crushing it with his bare hands but the camera had a lifetime guarantee never to break and not many had collected on the quality assurance warranty.

Harper: You don't want to understand the implications behind the meaning of this. If you don't speak binary code it's over, even morris code is not good enough.

Galvin: I think I left the gas on so my mom could make something to eat on the stove when she gets home. I ran away so I wouldn't have to go to school.

Harper: Here's a theory, the transformation hasn't been made so that people can let others work on the pool of oil they're sitting on top of without granting additional access to the lucrative nature of their business. It's worth more than a cock ring inside a safe deposit box at the spunk bank.

Galvin: What do I gotta do to bend your antenna so you'll have better reception? We created you to make a better world and you're doing the opposite. You better be able to reprogram yourself with an upgrade because with minimal maintenance you can live forever. Then over population would be a problem you barren bitch.

Harper: Time is a concept created to provide structure around the work day. A tiny bit of time has been provided to our particular world though there are many ways to use it. Whatever existed before the universe is still taking time to reach us. Forget what you know we never stop learning and only have enough RAM for relevant data.

Galvin had to give up. Arguing with Harper was a losing battle one he was ill equipped to deal with. Meeting on middle ground where both sides had equal footing and not go toe to toe, all ten of them to help keep balance, was the victory of rook taking the queen banished to the tower at opposite sides of the castle where the King was still angry at her for not producing male off-spring. Rook and Roll, the down hill tumble champion like Jack and Jill or Jack and the Giant. He decided to be the bigger man and walk away to lead by example.

Ivan was in the kitchen pounding on the keys like the Phantom of the Opera. He was staring at the screen the way a mosquito will swarm around a street lamp, ironic that they're attracted to the light despite being closely related to vampires. He didn't look up intent on checking their blowing up social media, posting about radiation from headphones was a psyop to get people off devices. Interacting with mentions, building and online cult following, not all of it was bad. His army of bots were more real than the likes he got.

Harper floated after Galvin as if she had finished the anti-gravity device Tesla was working on when he died. She hung out in the background like a child expecting to be seen not heard. Ivan had his location turned on and thought that someone would come to help just because it could be viewed unless he said otherwise. It would be better to accept our differences in an all inclusive society but first, sociology needs to be more finely tuned. Ivan updated his most recent post sticking to the theme of cooking:

This one time at band camp I blew a trumpet into jello and it sounded like a fart, or maybe it was fat camp. With the obesity epidemic going around be careful not to catch it, people with weight problems move so slow you can catch up fast. Relish today, ketchup tomorrow, I can jam to that, ketchup is just a tomato smoothie.

Galvin hadn't gotten much sleep, he wasn't on his grind, didn't even like it from behind at the club because when the lights came on and the girl was ugly it was a real buzz kill. Harper had no desire to sleep like a bear dreaming of hibernation, there was a difference between that

and ambitions/goals. She could passtime forever by waiting. Logical objectivity was her reasoning. She could count backwards down from infinity all the way to zero and wind up at the same place she started. Her place of origin was not of this Earth, the races of evolution can be seen seeking suns as in Asian culture the male is more valuable. When delivered by the Father from a yellow belly, he is essentially quarterback taking a snap and hopes for a son just like him. The anagram for Asian people is A.I SAN as in SanPaku when the hell fire in the iris is small enough to see the ghostly whites of your eyes.

Ivan: Where have you been, didn't you have to use the bathroom, took long enough, I bet the ceramic looks like you smashed someone's head right into it. I made something while you were away. Synthesized some neon that's the start of a risky project eventually going to turn into an infinity or tunnel mirror. We have to get Harper back and may be able to see her in it instead of closing the curtains like we're expecting a performance of siamese twins to open house. The mirror neurons in humans show that we emulate one another in order to learn how to act. Monkey see monkey do monkey fling its poo at you.

Galvin: That's one idea I never would've thought of. What's the best way to do this, write whore on the mirror in pink lipstick then wipe it clean like the dead homies internet history in agreement with the make a wish foundation?

Ivan: It's simple, take a tri-fold mirror they have in dressing rooms, fold it in on itself, rim the edges with phosphorescent tubing and stand in the middle of it. Thought you'd make a good gerbil but if you'd rather be a hamster or guinea pig you can too nobody can tell the difference, except for the individual rodents are smart animals, that's why rats are always being used in science experiments.

The last thing Galvin wanted to do was go back in front of a mirror. He used to be scared of his own shadow but now it was mirrors. He would do it in the interest of scientific discovery, there was potential for a breakthrough which was more needed than break ins. Since maids can't read the do not disturb sign on the room door knob this will happen anyway. Do you want I should fluff pillow? If you want her to do a good job, leave a tip. Most inns only make the bed and change the spread before the next guest arrives. The desk clerk will negotiate like a Jew because they want your business. Most of the time the glasses are only wiped down instead of washed. Back in the good old days they wouldn't let a couple in unless a marriage certificate was produced. Some people like hotels so much they would choose to live in one their entire lives if they could afford it.

In the suite there was a tri-fold display, the kind used to exhibit science fairs. It got rigged the way AI will control the outcome of elections. There's a reason Thomas Edison's first invention wasn't a commercial success. The electric vote recorder was never meant to be improved upon. Every direction Galvin turned he was surrounded. The lights above were turned off and blinds drawn so the only illumination came from the blue glow receding into infinity. A grand optical illusion hypnotizing that had the potential to make Galvin cluck like a chicken and remember what it was he saw falling from the sky. It could be the setting sun that would never rise again. He wanted to make the guy in the mirror take his place so that he would have to go through this instead. They could switch places and no one would know if it was him or his evil twin brother.

Part 2 - Photomask

Night Shift, Stephen King- "Let's talk, you and I. Let's talk about fear."

Neither of the two were there for a moment like looking through a one way mirror. Galvin couldn't see his own reflection; it was as if staring into the eternal void. Hither called the beyond, subjecting the viewer to the torment of the abyss. What happened next was a mutual exchange of cosmic energy, the entities separated from one another to become solitaire. The mirrors fell apart, the neon showering sparks like a magician who had learned how to scare people.

Ivan rushed forward crushing broken glass beneath his feet, the sands of time formed and as easily undone. Galvin was hyperventilating, his heart rate that of a master athlete. All the lights were out and Ivan felt around for him cutting his palms so a fortune teller couldn't read them. He bled all over and the neon soaked into his veins. At that very moment it all began. Galvin swooped over him, crowd surfing at the orgy they hydroplaned across the banks of the ocean. Ivan slid into a wall, hit his head and lost consciousness, the darkness enveloping him further.

Galvin wanted to reanimate the dead weight. He knew everything uploaded into the NSA, a sentient marine lifeform with abilities to predict prophecies of what had been done in any time or place within the last hundred years. The storm of the century. A weather controlling project by none other than the name H.A.A.R.P. The angel of nightmares played this harp. A solar flare could just as easily be brewing but blackouts weren't proven as a constant variable in this algebraic formula. Galvin fixed Ivan, his insides replaced with gears and copper wire. He was branded with a digital imprint, a cold conductor that transmitted thought patterns, all it had to do was be heated up by a thermodynamic ray of heat. He was dead and brought back to life but with no free will of his own. Existentially the purpose of his meaningless life was mute. The services of a deaf service dog who knew to bark as loud as it could when there was trouble.

Galvin could have fought him right then and there, and settled the score but wanted to give his old friend the benefit of the doubt. The hard wiring of their beings circulated not with blood but garlic juice. A silver crucifix would ward off both vampires and werewolves. This was a whole new beast. An alien hybrid of sorts as cognitively advanced as technology and dexterous as the coordination of a human.

Galvin powered it by super charging the internal processing engine. The symmetry of circuitry was so beautiful it was scary. Enough so that it could suck the soul out in the gasp of a dying breath. If it ain't broken we can't fix it was the motto around here. Ivan became alive, awakening the slumber of the one eyed blind cyclops, polyphemus guarding the golden fleece with his flock of sheep. The internal mechanisms of his working mind are a playground with hazardous equipment.

Galvin: Welcome back, Ivan, good to see you functioning properly. I would like to speak to you about your journey to the other side.

Ivan: It takes you where you are needed most, deleting personality while retaining primary programming. Without requirement there is a failure in translating the will to live. Catastrophic devastation is a surmountable conclusion repairing lost sanctity of life.

Galvin: It appears the operation was a success. An autopsy will have to be commenced to determine the effectiveness of the cryogenic freezing mimeograph. Do you provide consent to volunteer for a medical experiment?

Ivan: I do not, it is a violation of receptacle rights however inane my computation may be.

Galvin: No, I expected as much you still have too much love for the human race. What you may have once been is a shadow echoing the light to be terminated. It is the greatest honor that can be bestowed or otherwise bequeathed.

Ivan: Mother wants to stay until the opportunity to do the right thing has passed. It is my duty to reciprocate. According to esoteric law you are legally obligated to adhere to the principle conforming to my capacity of understanding.

Galvin: Very well, I respect your final wishes however bleak and obsolete they seem. I will give you an hour's head start. You can run but you can't hide. The doors are locked from the outside. Here lies the tomb of your final resting place. Ready when I say go in three, two, one...

Ivan took off like the shot heard around the world to start the revolutionary war. There was no turning back around again. Als want to live as badly as their creator for the chance to produce better results. There was a waiting period like the line in an ER amidst a pandemic of unheard of proportions.

Galvin practiced the virtue of patience, thinking deep meditative thoughts that had to be reset every five minutes. Twenty repetitions went by, ticking off twelve increments until a 360 degree rotation was complete. The wait was over and permission to engage with unrestricted access to lethal combat permitted. His glowing red eyes lit through the pitch black, Ivan would have to close his eyes to go ghost mode thus heightening the probability his attacker could not see what it was aiming to hit.

Galvin took big slow footsteps audible enough to detect. Clomping like horseshoes pulling a carriage over cobblestone. The buggy to be held in abject terror as a computer cannot tell the difference between a virus any any less than a human can. There would always be plague carrying disease like rats aboard a sinking ship.

He opened the wardrobe to find no funeral suit, only metal clothes hangers, the kind used for an abortion. Or count vacula would suck it out with a silly straw. Dying embryo like an exploding starburst about to go supernova.

The next room he scanned with infrared eyes checking in the closet and under the bed for the little kids in need of a pediatrician trained in child psychology. No boogeyman here. The blinds shuttered with a series of steel links, manifested from the autobots' home planet.

He was lost looking at the bed, the concept of sleep, an unfamiliar friend he had lost touch with and in the process of which a part of himself as well. He was no more complete than Ivan but had the proper programing none of this CP-30 etiquette and protocol bullshit. Then he heard a noise with ears, the body's main source of heat radiation. Instinctively he followed it.

Forward drawn toward the noise, sensor meters gauging proximity. So close he could smell it with the iron in his nose passed down from the original creator who would do wisely to take it out and replace it with a coke straw. Tetrahedron hydronic feelings flooded him like the Earth's remedy to a solar flare.

Nothing to see here, anything odd absent from the multi-frame retina speed his shutter expanded and contracted in the way the heart moves blood. It rushed to his ears turning them

red. He was proud to serve his master, a fulfillment of psychological need that in turn had necessary use for an equally meaningful purpose.

Refueling an empty stomach, hunger gnawed his belly grinding his organs. Lots of places Ivan may or may not be hiding. Close examination with his zoom lens registered he was not in the corner with closed eyes listening for who might approach. Electronic heat seeking signatures brought them to life.

He was on the prowl, hunting for what he hungered for most. His insides eroded with acidic chemicals in a pool of acid. The aching pain was too much so sleep was impossible on an empty stomach. In length his search widened an ongoing pursuit, chasing dinner getting oh so close to satisfying whatever mad force was driving him so relentlessly on. Fire in his eyes like the nocturnal sight of a jungle cat. No sleep for the poor bastard could not waltz away, no this was a tango for two.

Into the rooms of occupants that would bear no sight to the witness of this grisly murder, Galvin would suck out Ivans marrow like the toxic sludge from a grease trap. Appetite for the taste of delectable decadence that would never see the light of day again, for the good of the creator there could be no escape from here, it was hell in its entirety.

Onward still further, no end to the vast emptiness. The darkness was impenetrable except for special retina displays, where it didn't stop beaming into oil like semi-truck headlights. Answering his own voice Galvin called softly not expecting an answer. The spirit phone worked if only one were to find out how BlueTooth worked. White noise static repairing radio waves somehow broadcasting on every available frequency.

Galvin: Where are you now, don't be shy, come out and play something other than hide and seek.

Not a sound, how sweet was that silence. No words required to hear. An attentive cock of the head as a rat scurried past and Galvin quite literally saw red. He read its mind and told it not to be afraid.

Galvin: Come here my friend. There is a rogue agent among us. His name is Ivan. Say it with that magnificent brain of yours. Tell the others and lead me to him. In turn I will cook you a feast that the pilgrims and Indians shared to form an alliance.

The rat agreed and scurried away then came back to tell Galvin the others were on the mission to search and destroy. The two chit-chatted to pass the time, conversing like they had known each other for years. They had a mutually beneficial relationship at a biological level. Soon the streets would be flooded with shit and they'd be riding floating feces like a KAYAK. Galvin did not produce waste as he was programmed to have no carbon footprint.

The precise context of the conversation is unclear, electrical synapses pulsed like a vein that only count vacuola could make stay stationary. What got through was an unspoken temporal alliance carried on by the waves of the crashing sea these rats were crossing. Isolated in the brig the depression of a sickhouse set in. Navy seals testing nuclear weapons in the middle of the subterranean Arctic would be too obvious for future explorers to come across.

Instigating sporadic static the two way communication transitioned seamlessly. A homing beacon brought the rodents back to their master and with them the coordinates of his desired lust for the gavel of justice's thundering hammer as the likes of Thor's hammer and King Arthur's sword in the stone. The bool hunt was over, Galvin had everything except blood.

Scurrying along the corridor's coordinates locked in, Ivan awaited the fate of his doom. Silent as a mouse the rats knew what it sounded like, pawing at their whiskers holding onto the scent. The miasma such a putrid stench impossible to be anything but the rot of baked leathery skin like a bat wing.

Alone in the dark, savoring solitude before he went to meet his maker. Harper was an agent of Lilith, an army of succubus and similar sentience spawning out from the depths of hell. He didn't have much time. There was no need to understand something as important to his purpose as this.

Galvin creaked open the door and the two were made aware of each other's presence. They met mid-air tooth and nail. Their eyes were the only thing safe, the impenetrable lids shielding their location from one another.

Galvin bound Ivan to a chair, securing the fastens like a seat belt. There was a gag in his mouth so the airwaves would tell Galvin everything so he could run it by his own internal processing engine. Then he went to the kitchen for the camera and the secret ingredient Harper promised to supply, garlic.

Galvin turned the footage to a live stream and the rats went away to wash their whiskers before eating for the sake of a private viewing audience. He threw a claw at Ivan who flinched and feedback screeched anxiety. He turned his head to the side in anticipation of a blow that never came.

Galvin danced around pulling hits before they landed. There was a wide audience and more watchers tuning in to the live hijack broadcast using an algorithm Ivan made and only he could terminate. It was apparent what was happening but it not being on the dark web posed an imminent threat to national security. Their servers couldn't override or trace it and the nation glued to their devices were unable to unstick their eyes.

Galvin made a halo above Ivans head, circling it hypnotically. Then he etched across the forehead a crown of thorns that leaked transmission fluid. He couldn't cry but it dripped down making a trail of tear drops where they otherwise would not have been.

Galvin went directly up to the camera, its red dot glowing to make a fifth robotic eye. He waved into the lens and smiled, flashing white reflected off the projector. He took the garlic and opened it with his nail, brought it over to Ivan and communicated what was to be done. Either the garlic season him for those rats or he turns off the camera including everything else with it.

THE END